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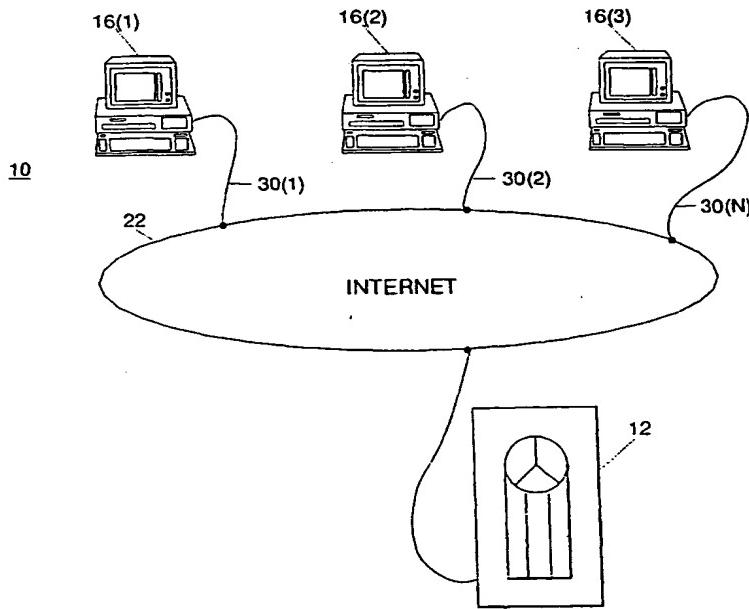
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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CASTING AND UTILIZING VOTES OVER A DISTRIBUTED COMPUTING NETWORK BY WAY OF ELECTRONIC MAIL



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(57) Abstract: A system and method are disclosed for facilitating voting over a distributed computing network which includes the features for and steps of transmitting data identifying an issue to a client computer over a distributed computing network to allow a user of the client computer to submit a vote on the issue with a single action of a computer input device, receiving the vote from the client computer over the distributed computing network, and transmitting a message to an interested party based upon the vote.

**SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CASTING AND UTILIZING
VOTES OVER A DISTRIBUTED COMPUTING NETWORK
BY WAY OF ELECTRONIC MAIL**

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/161,551, filed October 26, 1999 and U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 15 60/172,465, filed December 17, 1999, the disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entireties.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The subject invention relates to a system and method for acquiring and 20 utilizing public feedback on issues, and more particularly, to a system and method which utilizes on-line voting and commentary to provide an indication of the sentiment of a participating group of users on timely issues and to provide simultaneous transmission of the individual voter preference to appropriate decision-makers.

2. Background of the Related Art

A traditional method of determining public opinion has been polling. Polling 25 is a method of randomly sampling a statistically significant portion of a relevant community. The polling results are usually tabulated based on certain predetermined parameters such as political party affiliation, economic wealth, race, age or gender in an effort to extrapolate a

statistically accurate result. These results are then abstracted to individuals who did not actually participate in the poll. Polling of this type is to be contrasted from voting which is a more accurate measure of sentiment on a particular issue as it accounts for those people who actually participated in the poll, and likely reflects active, interested voters.

5 Politicians often use polls to inform their decision-making process with respect to issues, as do manufacturers, lawyers, and media organizations with respect to the products and services which they provide to consumers. However, the costs associated with conducting polls are extremely high as they are oftentimes labor intensive. Lawyers also take particular interest in conducting accurate polls, for example, by forming mock juries related
10 to pending cases. Lobbying and grassroots interest groups similarly use polling to persuade lawmakers of the need for particular legislation.

In contrast to traditional polling, the online voting mechanism of the subject invention permits users to vote and transmit their opinions - in real time - to key decision makers. It provides users with the opportunity to express their opinions and deliver them
15 simultaneously to those who can determine the outcome of a particular issue. It can be done inexpensively, immediately, and in an efficient and targeted way. Grassroots organizations could, for example, organize an online "petition" on a particular issue with results automatically delivered to Governors or members of Congress. Schools and labor unions, likewise, could sponsor votes on issues relating to reunions, school elections, collective
20 bargaining matters. Manufacturers could receive real-time input on new products and lawyers could determine reaction to certain evidence. Television stations could use the technology to have the audience vote on issues discussed on particular shows; radio shows could ask listeners to vote on favorite songs and send the results to the artists.

The widespread use of personal computers, modems and data connections has
25 allowed the growth of computer networks. The Internet serves as an example of a type of computer network, and indeed, is a large network of networks, all inter-connected, wherein mail, file transfer, remote log-in and other services are offered. The Internet uses a client-server architecture which is a network-based system that uses client software running on one computer to request a specific service, and uses corresponding server software running on a

second computer to provide access to a shared resource managed by the second computer. The second computer then connects to the Internet, which provides the specific service requested.

In 1989 the World Wide Web (hereinafter "WWW" or the "Web") was
5 developed by English computer scientist Timothy Berners-Lee to enable information to be shared among internationally dispersed teams of researchers at the European Organization for Nuclear Research. The Web is an application program which runs on individual computers and creates connections to multiple different source computers over one or more networks. Web files are formatted using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Web
10 communications occur using the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP). The Web is a component of the Internet which allows Internet addressable resources to be connected to one another. The concept of connectivity was originally conceived by Ted Nelson in the mid 1960s as a method for making computers respond to the way humans think and require information. In Web parlance, the Web connections are called links or hyperlinks. The
15 server that contains the files is called a Web site. Web sites contain documents of which a page is called a Web page. Web pages are displayed on a computer screen as agglomerations of text or images with sounds. On Web pages, hyperlinks may be displayed as text, typically in blue, or as a graphic icon. Users operating client computers interact with the Web by utilizing application programs known as Web browsers. When connected to a Web site,
20 users, e.g., clients interact with Web pages by using a mouse and pointing and clicking on visual objects on the screen.

The Internet is growing exponentially and becoming an essential component of everyday life. Businesses are utilizing it to access and distribute information and increase communication both internally and externally. Millions of people currently use the Web for
25 purposes as varied as buying cars, theatre tickets and clothes, selling antiques, collectibles and real estate, reading the news of the day and sending and receiving electronic mail.

In light of the foregoing, it would be beneficial to provide a system and method which utilizes a distributed computing network to facilitate the casting and utilization of votes in an efficient manner.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In brief, the subject invention provides a public opinion web site that hosts online referenda on timely issues of the day in a cost effective manner. More particularly, the present invention provides a unique system and method for acquiring and utilizing votes cast by a plurality of constituents to generate information relating to current events, elections, candidates, political actions, products, product features, sports, entertainment, technology, travel, family, environment, health, lifestyle, law and the like.

The system is configured to collect, store and manipulate data transmitted over a distributed computer network. In particular, the system allows an individual to cast a vote on a particular issue with a single click of a mouse or similar input device. A control mechanism allows each voter to cast only one vote on a particular issue. The results of the votes are then tabulated and displayed for interested parties such as the individuals who cast a vote or are browsing the Web, product manufacturers, or local, state and federal representatives such as mayors, governors, congressmen and the like.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention, there is disclosed a server for processing votes cast over a distributed computing network. The server includes a memory storing data identifying an interested party and a processor in communication with the memory. The processor is operative to present an issue to a user of a client computer, receive a vote on the issue from the user, transmit data relating to the vote to the interested party based upon the data identifying the interested party stored in the memory. The processor is further operative to generate a vote status cookie when the user submits the vote, transmit the vote status cookie to the client for storage, transmit data to the user that prompts the user to provide authentication data relating to the user, receive authentication data relating to the user and authenticate the user based on the authentication data.

A method is also disclosed for facilitating voting over a distributed computing network. The method includes the steps of transmitting data identifying an issue to a client computer over a distributed computing network to allow a user of the client computer to submit a vote on the issue, receiving the vote from the client computer over the distributed

computing network, transmitting a message to an interested party based upon the vote, transmitting data to the client computer from a server, prompting the user to provide authentication data and preventing the user from casting another vote on the issue.

- A method is also disclosed for evaluating legal cases over a distributed computing network: The method includes the steps of transmitting a set of inquiries relating to a particular case to a plurality of jurors associated with the case over a distributed computing network, receiving responses from the jurors over the distributed computing network, compensating the jurors for responding to the set of inquiries, and subsequently transmitting a message over the distributed computing network to an interested party based upon the responses received from the jurors.

These and other unique features of the system and method disclosed herein will become more readily apparent from the following description of the invention and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- So that those having ordinary skill in the art to which the subject invention appertains will more readily understand how to construct and use the same, reference may be had to the drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is an overview of an environment in which an embodiment of the present invention may be used;

- FIG. 2* is an example of a home Web page in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention;

FIG. 3 is an example of a Web page displaying an electoral vote in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention;

- FIG. 4* is an example of a Web page displaying a list of active votes in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention;

FIG. 5 is an example of a Web page displaying a statistical summary of a vote in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention;

FIG. 6 is an example of a Web page displaying an electronic magazine in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention;

5 *FIG. 7 is a flowchart depicting a process for collecting and tabulating votes in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;*

FIG. 8 is an example of a Web page displaying a statistical summary of a mock jury poll in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention;

10 *Fig. 9 is a flow chart depicting the sequential method steps by which votes are processed in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention; and*

Fig. 10 is a flow chart depicting the sequential method steps by which users are authenticated in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention.

15 These and other features of the system and method disclosed herein will become more readily apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments taken in conjunction with the drawings which set forth representative embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

20 In the description which follows, the terms "voting" and "polling" are not used interchangeably or synonymously. Indeed, they are to be differentiated from one another, as polling is used in an effort to extrapolate a statistically accurate result which may be abstracted to individuals who do not participate in the poll, while voting, on the other hand, only accounts for those people who actually participated in the poll.

25 Referring to *FIG. 1*, there is illustrated a schematic representation of an environment 10 in which the present invention may be implemented. The environment 10 includes a server 12 which communicates with a distributed computer network 22 via communication channel 32. Server 12 hosts a Web site and houses multiple databases

necessary for the proper operation of the subject invention. It is envisioned that the environment 10 may incorporate one or more servers to facilitate greater performance and stability of the subject invention by distributing memory and processing among several servers, as is well known. Further, a separate server may be utilized to present a client 5 interface while another server houses the vote engine and performs the remaining functions including, but not limited to, housing the multiple databases.

Distributed computer network 22 may include any number of network systems well known to those skilled in the art. For example, distributed computer network 20 may be a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), intranet or the Internet, as is well 10 known. The communication channels 30(1)-30(N) and 32, whether wired or wireless, are well known and therefore not further described herein. In a preferred embodiment, the distributed computer network 22 is the Internet. The preferred method of accessing information on the Internet is the Web, because navigation is intuitive and does not require technical knowledge. It should be recognized by those skilled in the art that the distributed 15 computing network 22 employed with the subject invention is not limited to any specific type of network, such as the Internet or World Wide Web. Rather, the subject invention may be used in a broad range of network environments, including for example, wireless phones. Interactive TV and similar types of devices that are not based on HTML.

Computers 16(1)-16(N) are operated by users and are devices that are able to 20 communicate with at least one server via network 22. For example, computers 16(1)-16(N) may be conventional desktop personal computers or workstations running software that enables communication with server 12. Alternatively, computers 16(1)-16(N) may be cellular telephones, telephones, pagers, and/or other personal-type devices running appropriate software that enables communication with server 12. The computers 16(1)-16(N) 25 communicate with the distributed computer network 22 via communication channels 30(1)-30(N), respectively. The variable N is arbitrary and by no means intended to represent or limit the number of computers and users who may utilize the subject invention. Although a plurality of computers can utilize the system 10 simultaneously, for simplicity, the

description below will refer to only one computer 16. Computer 16 allows users to access resources on server 12.

In a preferred embodiment, the configuration of computer 16 supports browsing the Web. Preferably, the hardware of computer 16 consists of a PENTIUM processor, 64 MB RAM, a 56k modem and supports a WINDOWS 95 or similar operating system and a Web browser as is well known and therefore not depicted. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that countless configurations of computers will effectively allow participation within the subject invention.

In a preferred embodiment, server 12 includes a memory for storing resources which are accessed by users over the Internet as is well known in the art and therefore not illustrated. Preferably, the resources are data, files, documents, Web sites, databases and the like. Further, the memory stores the instructions or program code necessary to implement the subject invention. At least one processor is in communication with a memory and a modem in order to facilitate interaction with computer 16 via the distributed computer network. The memory of server 12 should be large enough to support Web files, an operating system, the program code necessary to implement the subject invention, several applications and several databases.

In one embodiment, the memory of server 12 stores a multiplicity of informational databases which contain the data relating to various aspects of the system including for example administrators, vote administrators, advocates, columnists, editors, system administrators, voters, votes, positions, objective statement archive, position advocates, arguments, argument archives, reserved petitionees, vote reserved petitionees, U.S. representatives, editorials, editorial archives, position editorials, editorial associations, columns, column archives, vote traffic, postal information, images, and mass mailing. The mass mailing database, for example, contains records relating the type of mailing sent to a user based upon participation or non-participation in a particular group or vote. The server 12 also stores several result tables or data structures which contain dynamic information, including, for example, yea_nay tables, electoral tables and rank tables. Exemplary

informational and result tables are described in more detail below with reference to a record thereof and the fields that define that record.

The databases stored in the memory of server 12 are used in a relational arrangement, as is well known in the art, so that they relate to one another by way of fields 5 that store common data. It is noted that while the following description refers to specific individual databases, formats, records and fields, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that various modifications and substitutions may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

Referring to *Fig. 2*, a Web page 200 illustrates an exemplary home page 10 presenting access to features in accordance with the subject invention. Banner advertisement 210 provides a revenue stream for the proprietor of the Web site. Although banner advertisement 210 is depicted at the top of Web page 200, it will be appreciated that one or more paid banner advertisements can be located at various positions on the Web page in a multitude of shapes and sizes. Several features are presented on Web page 200. For 15 example, area 250 provides the ability to search the entire Web site associated with home Web page 200 to locate votes and discussions related to topics of particular interest to users.

In the preferred embodiment, area 220 contains user selectable options relating to different Web pages such as active votes, vote archives and discussions Web pages. Active votes are issues upon which a user may input an opinion or cast a vote. Selection of 20 active votes will present a Web page as described below with reference to *Fig. 4*. Similar to traditional voting, after a predetermined time period determined by the Web site proprietor, users will no longer be allowed to vote on an issue. At such time, the issue or query becomes a closed vote and the results are accessible under the vote archive option.

Preferably, the vote archive displays results on each issue for which a poll was 25 conducted, e.g., a closed vote. Further, additional information is available to users for each closed vote. For example, the organizations and/or individuals who receive electronic mail related to the vote results can be indicated. Users can also access a statistical summary of the vote results or post an opinion relating to the vote in an electronic chat room. Chat rooms

associated with closed and active votes allow users to view and present views related to current and archived votes with other users who may be individuals, interested organizations or interested parties.

In accordance with the subject invention, there are three levels of users that 5 operate within the system. These include anonymous users, registered users and authenticated users. In brief, an anonymous user has provided no identifiable information and thus has no profile stored in a database. In contrast, a registered user has provided an email address and zip code and has had any anonymous votes stored on their computer at the time of registration associated with this profile. However, the user has not liked back from 10 the system dispatched registration email and thus their votes are not sent to petitionees. Therefore, they may not view detailed vote results. They are however, eligible to receive mailing from the proprietor of the web site. Finally, an authenticated user has clicked on a unique link which has been mailed to them at the time of registration. The system therefore knows the user is an actual person and can forward their positions to interested parties.

15 Still referring to *Fig. 2*, tab bar 230 presents tabs 230a-k. Selection of a tab by a user causes a Web page depicting the active votes related to the associated categorical topic to be presented to the user. Several categorical topics are depicted, however the topics depicted are not intended in any way to limit the potential list of topics.

In a preferred embodiment, an active vote is also included on Web page 200 in 20 area 240. Area 240 illustrates a typical active vote topic, although it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that any topic may be represented as a vote. As shown in *Fig. 2*, an example of a vote or query is depicted relating to the Vice President's use of Air Force Two for campaign purposes. In area 240, a user can view more information, on both sides of the issue, by selecting or clicking on the "pro" tab 244 or the "con" tab 245. Further, additional 25 information such as current results, in-depth analysis and research may be accessed by the user selecting the "more details" option 242.

A user can express their position on an issue with a single mouse click by selecting the "YES!" option 246 or the "NO!" option 247 on Web page 200. Preferably, the

“VOTE” button 249 adjacent to the “YES!” and “NO!” options 246, 247 transforms into a “SUBMIT VOTE” button upon selection of “YES!” or “NO!” by the user. Selection of the “SUBMIT VOTE” button is a single click process executed by the user that begins the authentication process for the user’s vote as will be further described below with respect to
5 *Fig. 7.*

After a user has taken a position on an issue, the subject invention preferably automatically transmits the user’s vote to an interested third parties and/or interested organizations over the network, provided that the user has been properly authenticated in accordance with the procedures of the subject invention which will be explained in greater
10 detail hereinbelow. No other votes will be transmitted to the interested parties or organization. For example, in the active vote of *Fig. 2*, the user’s vote automatically goes via electronic mail to the Vice President and his opponent. A user’s vote may be sent out individually or packaged as a bundle with other votes which are then provided to the recipients. The recipients of the user’s votes will be able to analyze and evaluate the votes.
15 For example, the substance of user’s positions will indicate popular sentiment on an issue. Further, the quantity of votes will indicate the strength of interest or passion for an issue within a community. In another embodiment, a user may also have the ability to compose a text statement which is incorporated into the electronic mail sent to a recipient.

In response to voting results and associated electronic mail, recipients may
20 decide to modify their actions or further lobby for or against a cause. As a result, a new power to be heard, influence opinion and affect action is wielded by users. Consequently, the subject invention facilitates an efficient direct democracy by providing a forum for individuals to express their opinions.

It is envisioned that issues may be presented in several different formats. As is
25 well appreciated by those skilled in the art, the active vote can present a user with the ability to rank several candidates in order of preference (e.g., a rank vote). Further, the active vote can provide for selecting a single winner from a pool of candidates (e.g., an electoral vote).

Referring to *Fig. 3*, an exemplary Web page 300 displaying an electoral vote in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention is illustrated. Banner advertisement 310 provides a revenue stream for the proprietor of the Web site and area 320 contains user selectable options relating to different Web pages such as active votes, vote 5 archives and discussions Web pages. Tab bar 330 presents tabs which represent categorical topics within which votes may be presented to the user. In a preferred embodiment, selection of tab 330a causes an electoral vote to be displayed.

In the example shown, tab 330a displays a query relating to possible points of disillusionment associated with airplane travel. A user has the option to view additional 10 information on each of the six criteria presented by selecting the associated arrow icons 340a-f. A user can select one or more criteria by clicking within checkboxes 344a-f. Preferably, the "VOTE" button 349 transforms into a "SUBMIT VOTE" button upon selection of at least one checkbox. If the user is authenticated, selection of the "SUBMIT VOTE" button by enters the users selections into a corresponding database for that electoral vote and the vote 15 would be sent to at least one interested party. In this instance, the user's selections would automatically be sent via electronic mail to major airlines and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Referring to *Fig. 4*, an exemplary Web page 400 displays a list of active votes in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention. Web page 400 allows 20 user to vote on a plurality of issues or queries. Preferably, Web page 400 is accessed by selecting active votes in area 220 of Web page 200. Still referring to *Fig. 4*, topical information is preferably linked to the title of the respective vote. For example, by selecting "Marijuana as Medicine" a user will be presented with arguments for and against the proposition. In one embodiment, a message may be provided adjacent to the vote button 25 which indicates when the opportunity to cast a vote expires. By way of example, each of the votes illustrated in *Fig. 4* expires in six days. Upon expiry, the votes are archived and searching allows an appropriate user to view past results from the archive. Additionally, a user may select to see "more info", "results" or "discussion" regarding each vote.

Referring to *FIG. 5*, an example of a Web page 500 displaying a statistical summary of a vote in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention is illustrated. Web page 500 depicts the results of voting on a “yea_nay” issue. Preferably, Web page 500 is accessed from the “results” option presented on Web page 400. In one embodiment, the results are available for active and archived votes from several Web pages such as the Web page presented after a user votes, Web home page 200 and the like. The “yea_nay” issue results of Web page 500 relate to the first query presented on Web page 400 regarding “Marijuana as Medicine”. Bar graphs 510a and 510b allow users to readily determine the percentage of voters who cast a certain vote on an issue. Adjacent to the bar graphs 510a and 510b, the exact number of votes is displayed based upon a 15 minute delay schedule, as are the number of days for which the vote has been active and the time of day. Additionally, pull down menu 520 allows a user to limit the scope of the results displayed. For example, instead of displaying the results for “ALL VOTERS”, a user may select to display the results for only the “VOTERS IN THEIR STATE” or “ALL VOTERS IN THEIR DISTRICT”.

In the illustrated example, approximately 94 percent of all voters selected “yes” on the issue of whether or not marijuana should be legalized for medicinal purposes and 6 percent selected “no”. It is envisioned that different types graphics may be employed to represent the results of the survey as is well known to those skilled in the art, such as pie charts or line graphs.

With continuing reference to *Fig. 5*, a user desiring to participate in a vote can utilize several other features offered in area 530 in accordance with a preferred embodiment. Preferably, the user options are offered under the title “What else can I do?” The “Tell a friend” option allows a user to embed an electronic link to the current issue within an electronic mail message. The “Discuss in a Chat Room” option allows a user to anonymously interact in a chat room with other users on an issue. The “Post a Message” option allows the user to post a message to a message board for a current issue. The “Send an Email to Congress” option allows a user to compose a freeform electronic mail message

addressed to their congressional representative. Those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that other options and features may be provided to the user in a like manner.

Still referring to area 530 of *Fig. 5*, the "Be a VOTE.COM Advocate" option allows a user or organization to advocate a particular position with respect to an issue

5 presented by the Web site. Preferably, a custom interface to the system allows advocates to post their statements for publication on a Web page. Advocates may also submit rebuttals to other advocates submitting statements on opposing positions. It is envisioned that although advocates have a custom interface, the interface is adapted for input only and the Web site editor decides which advocacy statements to include therein.

10 Additionally, advocates can download a banner and accompanying HTML code which they may include on their own Web site. Preferably, the banner depicts an issue which is an active vote. At the Web site of the advocate, a user can select a position with respect to the issue. When a user selects such a position on an advocate banner, the user is transferred from the advocates Web site to the Web site of the subject invention. The vote is 15 then passed to the vote engine, as if it had been cast on the Web site of the subject invention and authentication procedures occur at that time.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a third party may create an interface for users, and utilize the subject invention as a vote engine to collect, process, store, manipulate and disseminate the data relating to the votes. This "remote voting" system 20 operates as a companion network where partners of the web site proprietor may administer content delivered on their web site via the proprietors designed client mechanism. The content may be shared votes from the proprietors web site or custom content. User information collected by these means are stored in the proprietors database, but access to these voters may be granted to the partner. In return, the partner carries compelling 25 interactive content on their web site. The delivery mechanism is preferably implemented in Java, but other methods of implementation are envisioned. Partners administer their content through a specially designed administration area associated with the proprietors web site.

Another aspect of the subject invention provides a "Sign up for free email newsletters on topics that interest you" option that allows a user to select topics of interest, submit an email address, and receive related communications at the submitted email address relating to the topic. The "Order discounted magazines" option gives users an opportunity to acquire subscriptions to publications at a reduced rate while generating revenue for the proprietor of the Web site by way of commissions on sales and/or paid advertising from publishers. Although various options have been disclosed, it is well within the art to provide other options such as the ability to purchase a related product or service, and contribute to a political candidate or cause.

Referring now to *Fig. 6*, there is illustrated a Web page 600 designed in the form of an on-line magazine. The on-line magazine Web page includes links to commentary on an issue. In one embodiment, a link within the commentary is provided to allow the reader to send an activist electronic mail message representing their view with respect to the commentary to an interested party. The reader who generates the activist electronic mail message is not required to vote or provide any information beyond that required for authentication. An activist electronic mail messages generated by readers may be bundled with other similar messages, or sent individually depending on the circumstances and quantity. It is envisioned that commentary on a variety of issues and topics lend to generating activist electronic mail messages for a variety of sources.

For example, as depicted in area 610 of *Fig. 6*, the commentary addresses the hazards associated with cell phones when used by young children. A user could select the title "Cell Phones and Kids: A Bad Call?". Upon selection of the title, the user would be presented with a commentary questioning the propriety of cell phones marketed for children. If a reader agrees, selection of an icon associated with the commentary will generate an activist electronic mail message that indicates their sentiment against such products. Preferably, the activist electronic mail message is then automatically forwarded to a concerned party, such as the manufacturers and marketers of cell phones.

In another embodiment, imbedded within the news and opinion of the on-line magazine, may be links to further research and links to Web sites hosted by interested parties

with viewpoints on the same issue. In yet another embodiment, the news and opinion will have an associated active vote. It is envisioned that electronic mail messages within the subject invention may also represent a commentary or opinion drafted by a user for an interested party.

5 Referring now to *Fig. 7*, a flowchart illustrates a process for collecting and tabulating votes in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. At step 700, server 12 contains a Web site in HTML programming language or by other techniques well known in the art. Moreover, the subject invention may be configured to operate in a wireless or XML environment. In a preferred embodiment, the Web site provides an opportunity for a
10 user who has accessed the Web site via the Internet to cast a vote on a query with a single click of a mouse or similar input device. Preferably, Web pages, as illustrated in Figs. 2, are displayed. In particular, the query may be a yea-nay, rank or electoral vote on issues ranging from politics to pop culture.

15 Server 12 also contains relational database tables which support step 700 and the creation of the Web site of the subject invention. For example, referring Table 1 hereinbelow, there is shown the record schema for a vote table. A vote record schema contains the data necessary to identify a query presented to users. The VOTE_ID field is a unique system-generated key used to identify a vote presented on a Web site of the subject invention. The TYPE field indicates the vote as one of a yea_nay, rank or electoral type.
20 The TITLE field indicates the title of the vote. The MODIFIED_ON field indicates the date upon which the particular vote was last altered. The RANK field determines the placement of the particular vote within a list of displayed votes. The LEAD_IMAGE_ID field contains the graphic which would appear if the vote appears on the homepage. The IMAGE_ID field contains a graphic relating to the vote. The HEADER_TEXT field stores the text which can
25 be displayed instead of the graphic relating to a particular vote.

Still referring to Table 1 below, the OPENS field is the date upon which the vote appears to the users. The CLOSES field is the date upon which voting on an issue closes. The VOTE_KEYWORDS field is a list of words which classify the particular vote for a search engine associated with the Web site of the subject invention. The

PETITIONEE_IMAGE_ID field contains a graphic reference for an image relating to a vote.
The PETITIONEE_TEXT field describes where the vote results are to be sent.

The RESERVED_PETITIONEE field indicates whether or not the results will be sent to individually specified recipients. The REPRESENTATIVE_PETITIONEE field indicates whether or not the results will be sent to individually specified representatives. The ACTIVE field indicates whether or not the vote should be displayed to users. The ARCHIVE field indicates whether or not the vote should be displayed in the vote archive. The SHOW_RESULTS field indicates whether or not the results should be displayed. The NON_AUTHENTICATED_RESULTS field determines whether the results include all votes including those cast by non-authenticated voters.

The ASSOCIATED_CONTENT_MODIFIED field indicates if any content associated with the vote has been modified.

TABLE 1

1. <u>VOTE</u>
VOTE_ID
TYPE
RANK
TITLE
LEAD_IMAGE_ID
IMAGE_ID
HEADER_TEXT
OPENS
CLOSES
VOTE_KEYWORDS
PETITIONEE_IMAGE_ID
PETITIONEE_TEXT
RESERVED_PETITIONEE
REPRESENTATIVE_PETITIONEE
ACTIVE
ARCHIVE
SHOW_RESULTS
NON_AUTHENTICATED_RESULTS
ASSOCIATED_CONTENT_MODIFIED

A child of the vote table contains detailed information on a single position in a vote. For example, a single position table, such as Table 2 hereinbelow, shows the record schema for a child of a vote table. In Table 2, the POSITION_ID field is a unique system generated code that refers to the query. The POSITION_ID field contains the substance of a voter's position. For example, in a yea_nay vote it denotes yes or no and in an electoral vote it denotes the selected candidate's name. In a rank vote, a sub table is created to denote each option and the ranking associated therewith. The VOTE_ID field is a numeric key relating child Table 2 to parent Table 1. The TITLE field contains the title of the position. The DESCRIPTION field contains a description of the position. The AUDIO_CLIP_TITLE field contains the title of an audio clip associated with the position, and the AUDIO_CLIP_URL field contains the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) of the audio clip associated with the position. Similarly, the VIDEO_CLIP_TITLE field contains the title of an video clip associated with the position, and the VIDEO_CLIP_URL field contains the URL of the video clip associated with the position.

With continuing reference to Table 2, the OBJECTIVE_STATEMENT_FILENAME field contains the published filename of the objective statement which describes the purpose of the position, while the OBJECTIVE_STATEMENT_TITLE field contains the title of the objective statement, and the OBJECTIVE_STATEMENT_BODY field contains the text of the objective statement.

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TABLE 2

2. POSITION
POSITION_ID
VOTE_ID
TITLE
DESCRIPTION
AUDIO_CLIP_TITLE
AUDIO_CLIP_URL
VIDEO_CLIP_TITLE
VIDEO_CLIP_URL
OBJECTIVE_STATEMENT_FILENAME
OBJECTIVE_STATEMENT_TITLE
OBJECTIVE_STATEMENT_BODY

Referring once again to Fig. 7, at step 710 a user views the query and has the ability to conduct related research as described above. Upon taking a position, a user casts a vote on the Web site of the subject invention with a single mouse click. For example, in the case of a yea_nay vote, the user utilizes a mouse or similar computer input device to select 5 "YES!" or "NO!" on a particular issue and submit their vote as described above with respect to Fig. 2. The manner in which votes are processed in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention is depicted in great detail in Fig. 9.

Once a vote is cast by a user, server 12 generates tables which store the vote for each corresponding vote type. For example, result Tables 3, 4 and 5 below show record 10 schema for system-generated yea_nay, electoral and rank vote tables, respectively. Within result Tables 3, 4 and 5, the title corresponds to the vote type for which the table holds results. Therefore, each table corresponds to a different vote type. Referring to the fields of Table 3, 4 and 5, the VOTE_ID field contains a unique system generated number which allows a unique table to be maintained in the server for every user vote. The POSITION_ID field indicates the position taken on a particular vote. The VOTER_ID field indicates the 15 user who submitted the vote. The VOTE_DATE field contains data identifying the date upon which the vote was submitted.

Referring to Table 5, the <POSITION_ID>_DISPLAY_RANKED field contains the numeric rank given to the position and the <POSITION_ID>_USER_RANKED 20 field contains the numeric rank given to the position by the user.

TABLE 3

YEA_NAY <VOTE.ID>
VOTE_ID
POSITION_ID
VOTER_ID
VOTE_DATE

TABLE 4

3. <u>ELECTORAL <VOTE.ID></u>
VOTE_ID
POSITION_ID
VOTER_ID
VOTE_DATE

TABLE 5

<u>RANK <VOTE.ID></u>
VOTE_ID
VOTER_ID
<u><POSITION.ID> DISPLAY_RANKED</u>
...
<u><POSITION.ID> USER_RANKED</u>
...
VOTE_DATE

With continuing reference to Fig. 7 in conjunction with Fig. 9, upon

- 5 submission of a vote by a user, the process advances to step 720. Thereupon, server 12 sets a vote status cookie on the user's computer 16. Creating cookies and storing them on computers are well known within the art and therefore not further described herein. The vote status cookie prevents a user from casting multiple votes and skewing polling results. An anonymous user is one who has not voted previously or has removed the vote status cookie
- 10 from their computer 16. Thus, an anonymous user does not have a vote status cookie on their computer 16. An identified user has a vote status cookie on their computer from server 12. An authenticated user has a vote status cookie indicating successful authentication, as will be discussed below.

In a preferred embodiment, the vote status cookie includes the VOTER_ID, 15 the votes cast and whether or not the voter is authenticated. The VOTER_ID is stored in the databases on server 12 and in the cookie on user computer 16. When a computer 16 is tagged with cookie after voting, the user is still anonymous, as their vote is not associated with a profile in the system database. Thus, no more votes may be cast from that particular

computer on a specific issue. However, anonymous users become identified when a vote status cookie is stored on their computer 16 after submission of a vote.

As displayed in the authentication process flow diagram of Fig. 10, after submission of a vote by an anonymous user or a non-authenticated user, server 12 requests an email address and zip code from the user. When a user submits an electronic mail address and zip code, server 12 verifies the validity of the zip code against a static list stored in memory. Such lists are commercially available and easily stored as well as searched using pattern matching on server 12 by those skilled in the art. Additionally, the electronic mail address is also verified as unique against a list of authenticated users. In this way, an authenticated user who accesses the subject invention on several different computers will be limited to one vote per issue. In another embodiment, the system places no restrictions on the number of votes and electronic messages which a user may generate.

In accordance with the subject invention, cookies are only the "first line of defense" against repeat voting by registered users. If a user is registered and attempts to vote repeatedly, their vote is rejected once they are identified because of a normalization process associated with the database. In particular, the result tables, i.e., the `yea_nay`, electoral and rank vote tables cannot contain duplicate user identifiers for the same vote.

Reference once again to *Fig. 7*, at step 730, the process continues by server 12 responding to the user electronic mail message containing the zip code and an electronic mail address. The electronic mail message from server 12 contains an authenticating link-back. In order to become authenticated, the voter is requested to select the authenticating link-back which automatically accesses a link-back Web page. When the link-back Web page is successfully accessed by the user, server 12 authenticates the user. In particular, the user's status is updated to "authenticated" in the appropriate database and subsequently this status is updated in the cookie to reflect the database. In essence, the cookies are employed to manage computing resources efficiently, so that the database does not have to be queried for user status each time the user casts a vote. Additionally, server 12 stores the voter's authentication status in a corresponding voter table such as illustrated below in Table 6.

In a preferred embodiment of the subject invention, the voter table contains the data relating to users as shown in Table 6. The VOTER_ID field is a unique system-generated number associated with each user. The EMAIL field stores the electronic mail address associated with each user in an encrypted format. Thus, if an individual where to gain unauthorized access to Table 6, the identity of the user will remain confidential. The POSTAL_ID field is the zip code associated with each user. The AUTHENTICATED field indicates the authentication status associated with each user, and the MODIFIED_ON field indicates the date the table was last updated, which generally occurs on the dates of creation and authentication.

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TABLE 6

4. <u>VOTER</u>
VOTER_ID
EMAIL
POSTAL_ID
AUTHENTICATED
MODIFIED_ON

It is envisioned that if either the electronic mail address or zip code supplied by a user during authentication is invalid, an error page is displayed to the user and the process terminates, as depicted in the flow chart of Fig. 10. If a user has already participated in a vote, the user will not be allowed to vote again. As a result, users can only cast a single vote for each query. If a user participates in a different vote, the result is stored in the appropriate table on server 12 and the vote status cookie is updated to reflect participation. Technology for controlling and monitoring access to Internet resources are described, for example, in U.S. Patent No. 5,708,780, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

With continuing reference to Fig. 7, at step 740, voting results are tabulated for display to users upon submission of a vote. In a preferred embodiment, authenticated voters receive a customized display. For example, in a yea_nay vote, bar graphs indicate the

corresponding percentages of votes cast in the user's voting district or state as based upon the reported zip codes, as well as national or international results.

At step 750, server 12 prepares and sends an electronic mail message based upon a user's vote to specified recipients. The electronic mail message may be an indication of how a particular user voted, a summary report of how all users voted or the like. The recipients may include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following: individuals who are the subject matter of the vote, politicians in a position to draft legislation in response to the results and third party organizations interested in accessing users with certain interests. As a result, user opinions, as expressed by their votes, are provided directly to relevant recipients to create a dialogue for voicing the sentiment and interest level of the users without the intervention of lobbyists or the media.

The subject invention is also adapted generate revenue streams for the proprietor from several sources. One such source is by selling banner advertisements. Another source of revenue is the ability to utilize its user lists to send out commercial mass mailings based upon user's participation or non-participation in particular votes, groups of votes or categories of interests, or based upon the positions they may have taken ion certain votes. User's may opt out from this aspect of the system. Additionally, the vote engine contained in server 12 can be utilized for a fee by third parties to hold particular referendums on points of special interest, thereby generating income for the proprietor.

In still another embodiment, the subject invention presents information relating to jury trials. The resulting responses from users create an online mock jury for case studies, serve as online focus groups and the like. In a preferred embodiment, a case study presents the factual scenario and the respective arguments for the plaintiff and defendant for review by a plurality of users in a format similar to the voting issues described above with respect to *Fig. 2*. Further, a set of inquiries, including questions relating to a verdict, allow users to provide responses. It is envisioned that the inquiries may be multiple choice and short answer. Preferably, responses are aggregated demographically on Web pages for interested parties.

Referring to *FIG. 8*, an example of a Web page 800 displaying a statistical summary of a mock jury poll in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the subject invention is illustrated. Preferably, Web page 800 is sent to an interested party automatically upon completion of a case study. Alternatively, Web page 800 may be available to all users via the Internet, e.g., an open study or password restricted to a limited number of parties, e.g., a closed study as is known to those skilled in the art. It is also envisioned that Web pages including live and taped video and other traditional court room exhibits can be associated with Web page 800 to provide further information and therefore are easily accessed by users over the Internet.

Still referring to *Fig. 8*, area 810 contains links to the complete set of inquiries. Preferably, several of the inquiries solicit demographic information from the users such as race, state of residence, gender, age, occupation, level of education, salary and the like. Further, the inquiries include questions related to potential biases of jurors, a referendum on which party should win, an opportunity to express which facts determined the response, a damages award and the like. Although 29 queries are shown, it is well within the art to have any number of queries. Area 820 includes a table with a statistical summary based upon demographic criteria. Area 820 also includes the percentage for seven age groups out of the total users who participated in the study. Area 830 graphically depicts a summary based upon the user responses. As shown, area 830 includes a pie chart representing the percentage of each age out of the total number of participants. Although, *Fig. 8* depicts a demographic summary according to age using a pie chart, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that it is not limited to such. For example, the summary may include a summary of responses relating to damages awards by education level or race.

It is also envisioned that the case study is available to all users for a given period of time. Alternatively, the case study is restricted to users with specific criteria. Examples of specific criteria include users with particular demographic characteristics, within a geographic region and the like. Preferably, users are provided with an incentive to participate in the studies. In another embodiment, interested parties interact with users who have cast responses in an online chat room.

In another embodiment, the system could provide access to a database of previous verdicts for a fee. In still another embodiment, the previous verdicts are based on real and fictitious case studies. A subscriber to the system could search the database using keywords or by scanning a descriptive index to acquire case studies relative to their particular interests. In still another embodiment, an editorial and advisory board provides online expertise to subscribers interested in creating a case study in accordance with the subject disclosure.

In another embodiment, the vote engine of the subject disclosure presents different features of a particular product or service and solicits response to a set of inquiries from users. The resulting data submitted by users creates a market survey regarding the product or service for the manufacturer. Preferably, the Web page presenting the set of inquiries includes audio and video. The sponsor of the survey compensates respondents by providing a coupon, a payment, a gift or similar incentive. Further, users are more likely to participate in an Internet survey than in traditional surveys because input is accepted at their leisure from their residence. A further advantage of accessing respondents via the Internet is the relatively large number of individuals which can be accessed at minimal expense. Still another advantage is that Internet users span international borders which increases the scope of the survey.

In one embodiment, the product survey data is aggregated in a manner similar to that described above with respect to *Fig. 8*. For example, a company presents a new Web site to a target audience in order to solicit feedback related to the Web site design. The company pays a fee to utilize the vote engine of the subject disclosure to collect the data, process the data and provide aggregated results. As an incentive for participating in the survey, users receive a gift certificate in a nominal amount.

While the system and method has been described with respect to preferred embodiments, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that various changes and/or modifications can be made to the system and method without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of facilitating voting over a distributed computing network, comprising the steps of:
 - a) transmitting data identifying an issue to a client computer over a distributed computing network to allow a user of the client computer to submit a vote on the issue;
 - b) receiving the vote from the client computer over the distributed computing network; and
 - c) transmitting a message to an interested party based upon the vote.
2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of transmitting data to the client computer from a server.
3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of prompting the user to provide authentication data.
4. The method of Claim 3, further comprising the step of preventing the user from casting another vote on the issue.
5. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the data identifying the issue on a server.
6. The method of Claim 1, wherein voting is conducted over the Internet.
7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the data identifying the issue on a Web site of an advocate.
8. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of providing a Web page with data identifying an issue and presenting an icon selected from the group consisting of a vote icon, a pro tab icon and a con tab icon to permit a user to submit a vote with a single action of a computer input device.

9. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of encrypting data identifying the user.

10. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of transmitting the message over the distributed computing network.

11. A method of facilitating voting over a distributed computing network, comprising the steps of:

a) transmitting data over a distributed computing network identifying an issue from a server to a client computer to allow a user to submit a vote on the issue with a single action of computer input device;

b) receiving the vote from the client computer over the distributed computing network; and

c) transmitting data to the client computer over the distributed computing network prompting the user to provide authentication data to allow the server to prevent the user from casting another vote on the issue.

12. The method of Claim 11, further comprising the step of transmitting a message to an interested party based upon the vote.

13. A server for processing votes cast over a distributed computing network comprising:

a) a memory storing data identifying an interested party; and

b) a processor in communication with the memory, wherein the processor is operative to:

i) present an issue to a user of a client computer;

ii) receive a vote on the issue from the user; and

iii) transmit data relating to the vote to the interested party based upon the data identifying the interested party stored in the memory.

14. The server of Claim 13, wherein the processor is further operative to generate a vote status cookie when the user submits the vote.

15. The server of Claim 13, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit the vote status cookie to the client for storage.

16. The server of Claim 13, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit data to the user that prompts the user to provide authentication data relating to the user.

17. The server of Claim 16, wherein the authentication data comprises an address and a zip code.

18. The server of Claim 13, wherein the processor is further operative to receive authentication data relating to the user.

19. The server of Claim 18, wherein the processor is further operative to authenticate the user based on the authentication data.

20. The server of Claim 19, wherein the processor is further operative to prevent the user from casting another vote on the issue.

21. A method for collecting votes cast by a plurality of voters over a distributed computing network, comprising the steps of:

- a) transmitting a query to a computer associated with at least one voter;
- b) receiving a vote related to the query cast by the at least one voter; and
- c) transmitting a vote status cookie to the computer to prevent a submission of subsequent votes by the at least one voter on the query.

22. The method according to Claim 21, further comprising the step of transmitting at least one message to an interested party based upon the at least one vote.

23. The method according to Claim 22, wherein the step of transmitting at least one message comprises transmitting a statistical summary based upon the at least one vote.

24. The method according to Claim 21, further comprising the step of transmitting at least one message to an interested party selected from the group consisting of a company, an organization and an individual.

25. The method according to Claim 21, further comprising the step of designating a predetermined time period for receiving a vote.

26. The method according to Claim 21, wherein the steps of transmitting a query, receiving a vote and transmitting a vote status cookie are conducted over the Internet.

27. The method according to Claim 21, wherein the step of transmitting the query comprises creating a Web page with the query embodied in the Web page which presents a plurality of tabs relating to categories of queries.

28. The method according to Claim 21, wherein the step of transmitting the query comprises creating a type of query selected from the group consisting of yea_nay, rank and electoral queries.

29. The method according to Claim 21, further comprising the steps of:

- a) requiring the at least one voter to provide an address;
- b) authenticating the at least one voter based upon the address; and
- c) storing the address in memory to prevent the at least one voter from using a second computer to cast another vote on the query.

30. A method for providing commentary over a distributed computing network, comprising the steps of:

- a) presenting data relating to an issue to at least one client, the data including an option to send a comment to a contact associated with the issue;

- b) receiving the comment from the at least one client; and
- c) transmitting the comment to the contact.

31. The method according to Claim 30, further comprising the step of authenticating the at least one client.

32. The method according to Claim 30, further comprising the step of ensuring the at least one client provides only one comment on the issue.

33. The method according to Claim 30, further comprising the step of compensating the at least one client for submitting the comment.

34. The method according to Claim 30, further comprising the step of designating a predetermined time period for submitting comments.

35. The method according to Claim 30, further comprising the step of presenting the user with an icon to conduct further research relating to the issue.

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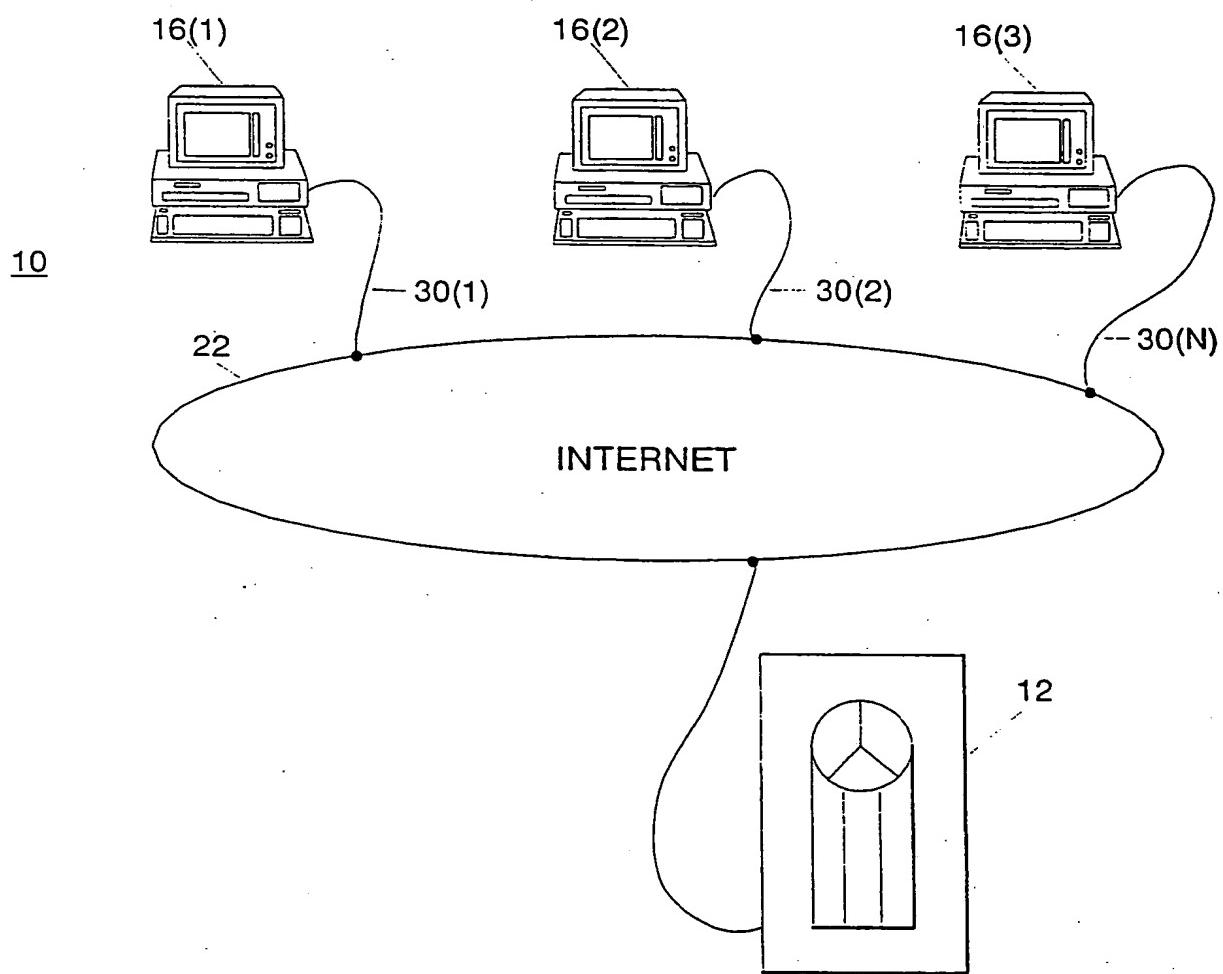


FIG. 1

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200

FIG. 2

220	Click Here for BizRate.com						
→ active votes	230c	230e	230g	230i	230k		
→ vote archive							
→ discussions							
230a	hot topics	sports	entertainment	tech	travel	family	business
230b							environment
230d							health
230f							gay
230h							legal
230j							
230l							
250	⇒ Search						
Today @ VOTE.com							
240	Is the Vice President's Campaign Abusing His Right To Use Air Force Two?						
246	YES! The Vice President's use of the White House Jet amounts to a huge taxpayer subsidy.						
VOTE	<input checked="" type="radio"/> NO! The Vice President is simply following Secret Service advice.						
247	⇒ more details						
248	Your vote will always be sent						
<u>WHERE IT COUNTS</u>							
We'll send your vote to the Vice President and his opponent, the Governor of Texas.							
244	PRO	CON	245				
As the Vice President conserves cash by using Air Force Two, his opponent must spend \$100,000+ each week to fly.				The Vice President's campaign pays the Government hundreds of thousands of dollars so he can use the plane.			

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300

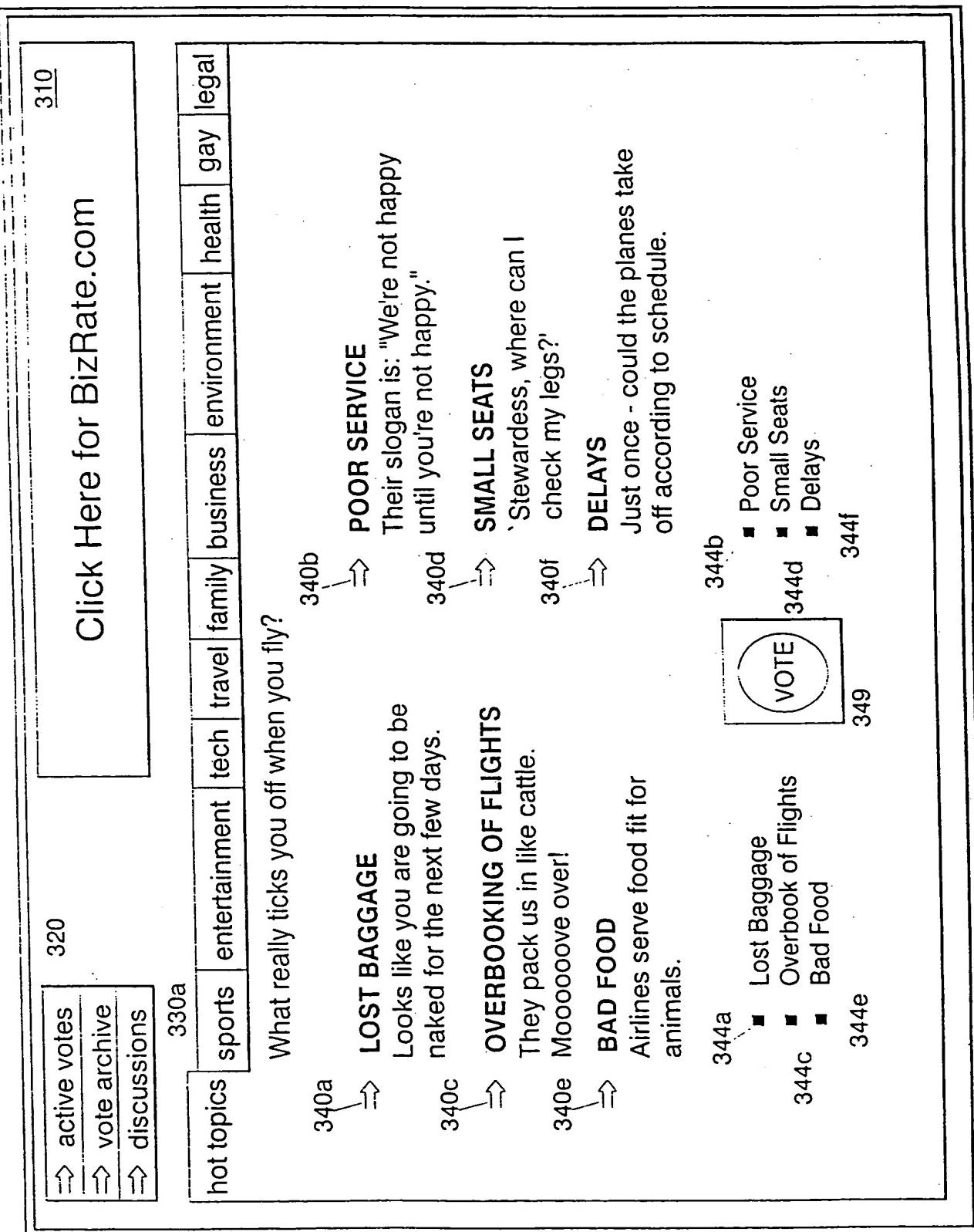


FIG. 3

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<p>→ active votes → vote archive → discussions → epicenter → about us</p> <p>So you wanna be a VOTE.com Advocate</p> <p>→ Search VOTE.com</p>	<p>→ Active Votes ⇒ Marijuana as Medicine? • More info • results • discussion</p> <p>VOTE</p> <p>Polls close in [6] days</p> <p>Cancer and AIDS patients need it for nausea, pain & wasting. Any legalization of pot will increase drug abuse and lead youngsters astray.</p>	<p>→ Tax the Internet? • More info • results • discussion</p> <p>VOTE</p> <p>Polls close in [6] days</p> <p>Everybody else pays sales tax, why not e-commerce? Can't we have one place without government with its handout?</p>	<p>→ Is it Appropriate to Execute <u>Convicted Murderers Who are Mentally Retarded?</u> • More info • results • discussion</p> <p>VOTE</p> <p>Polls close in [6] days</p> <p>If a killer has the capacity to determine wrong from right, his/her IQ should not be an issue. Executing a mentally retarded person doesn't serve justice; it demeans it.</p>
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FIG. 4

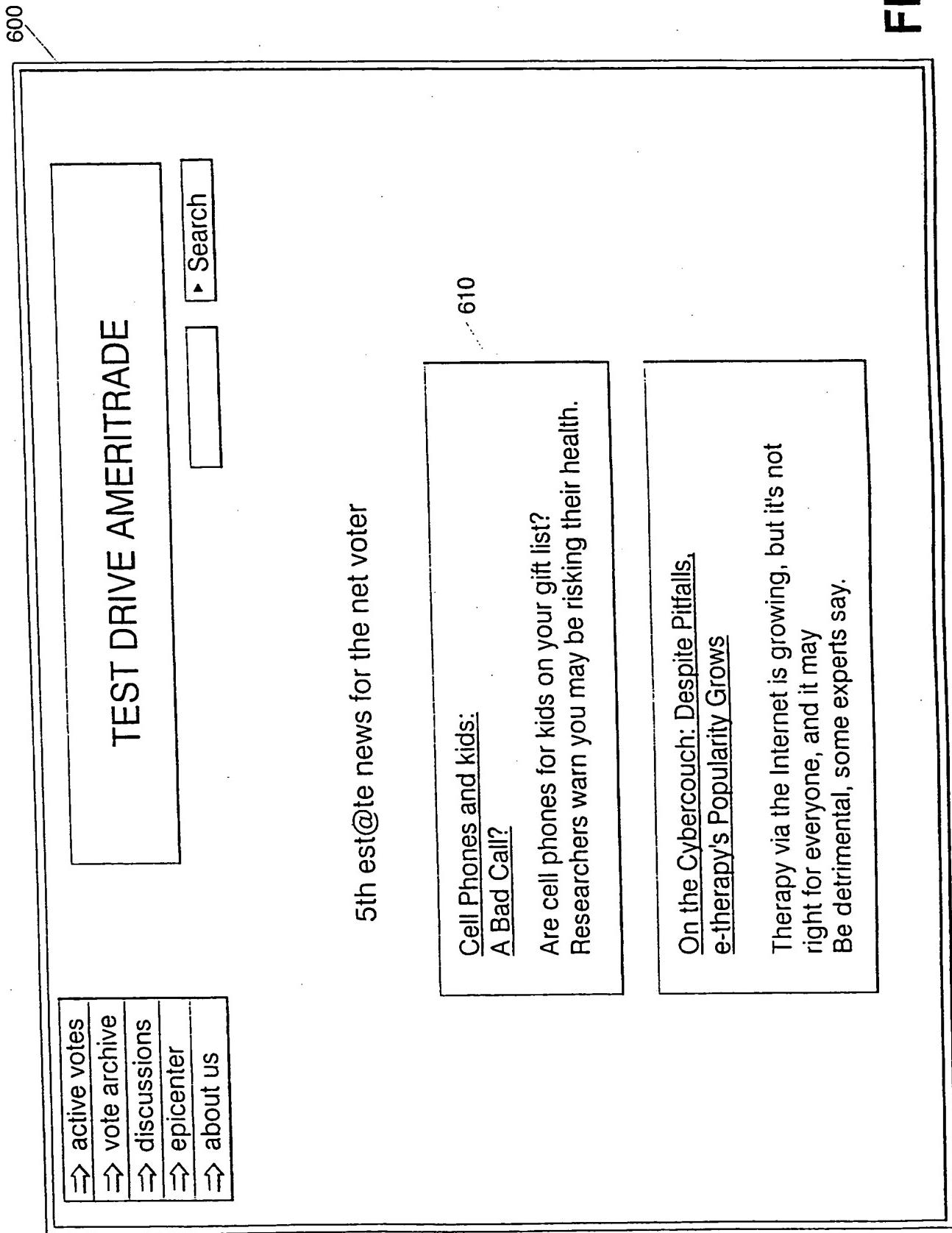
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500

<p>So you wanna be a VOTE.com Advocate</p> <p><input type="button" value="→ Search VOTE.com"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> VOTE</p> <p>Marijuana As Medicine?</p>	<p>■ YES!</p> <p>■ NO!</p>	<p>View Results by</p> <p>ALL VOTERS ▾</p> <p>Day 22, 5:48 PM</p> <p>Yes (31,423) <input type="checkbox"/> 94%</p> <p>No (1,996) <input type="checkbox"/> 6%</p>	<p>What else can I do?</p> <p>Tell a friend</p> <p>Discuss in a Chat Room</p> <p>Post a Message</p> <p>Send an email to Congress</p> <p>Be a VOTE.com Advocate</p> <p>Sign up for free email newsletters on topics that interest you</p> <p>Order discounted magazines</p>
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FIG. 5

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FIG. 6

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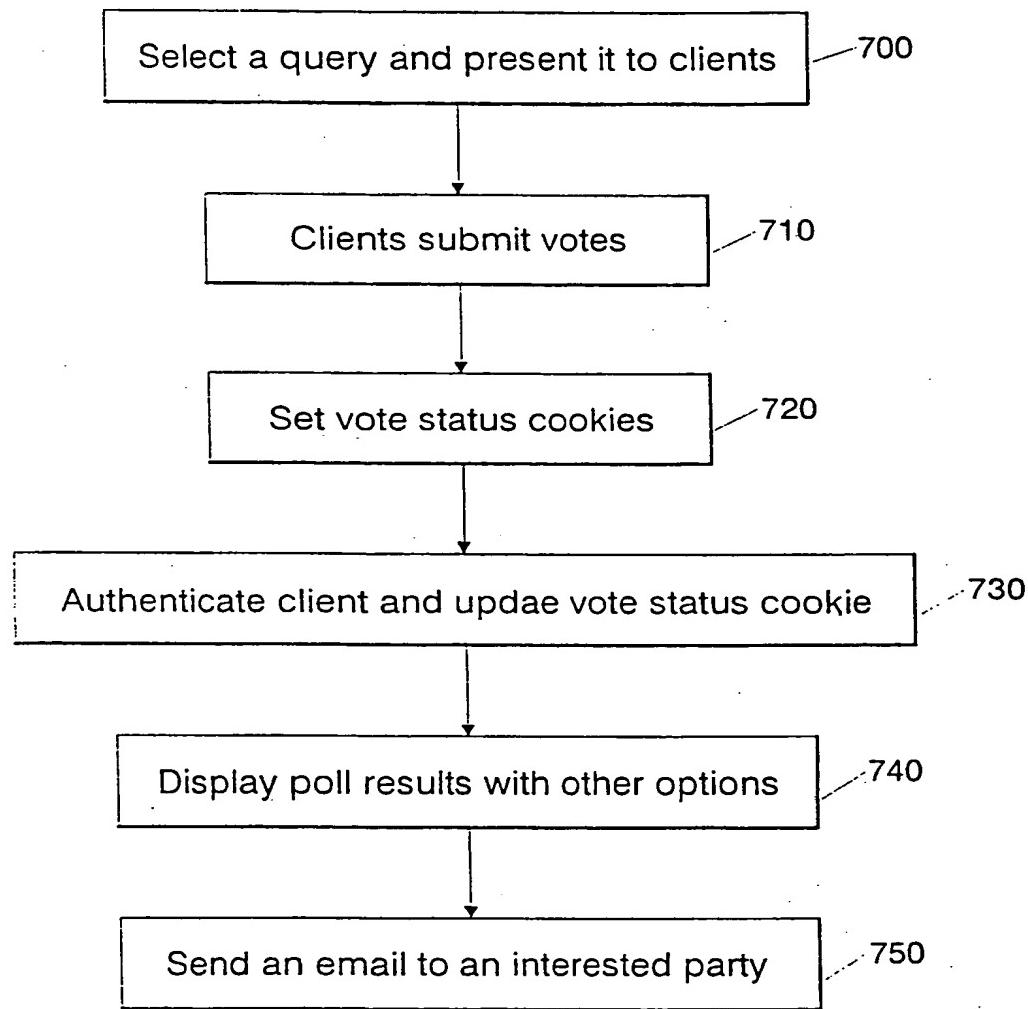


FIG. 7

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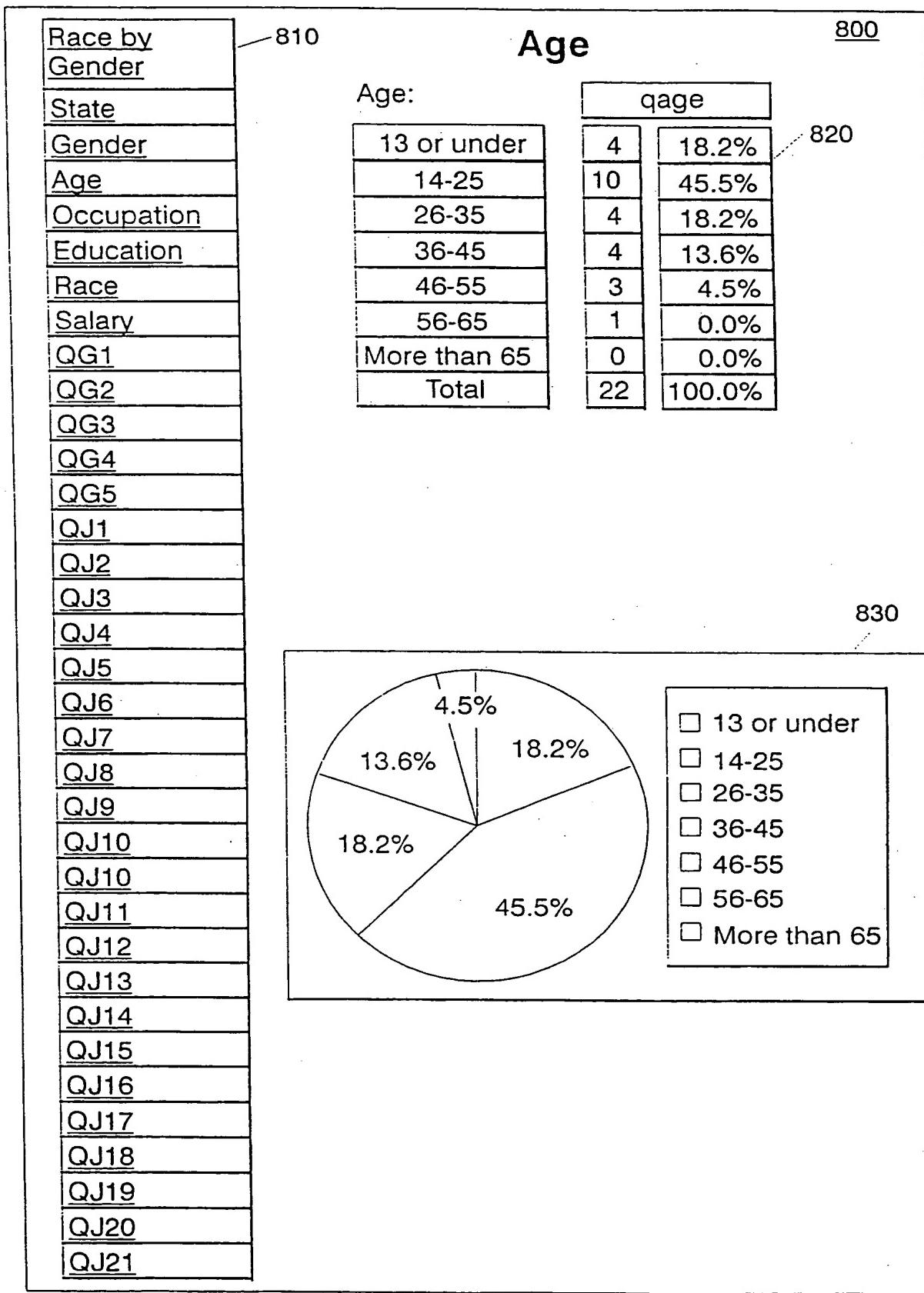
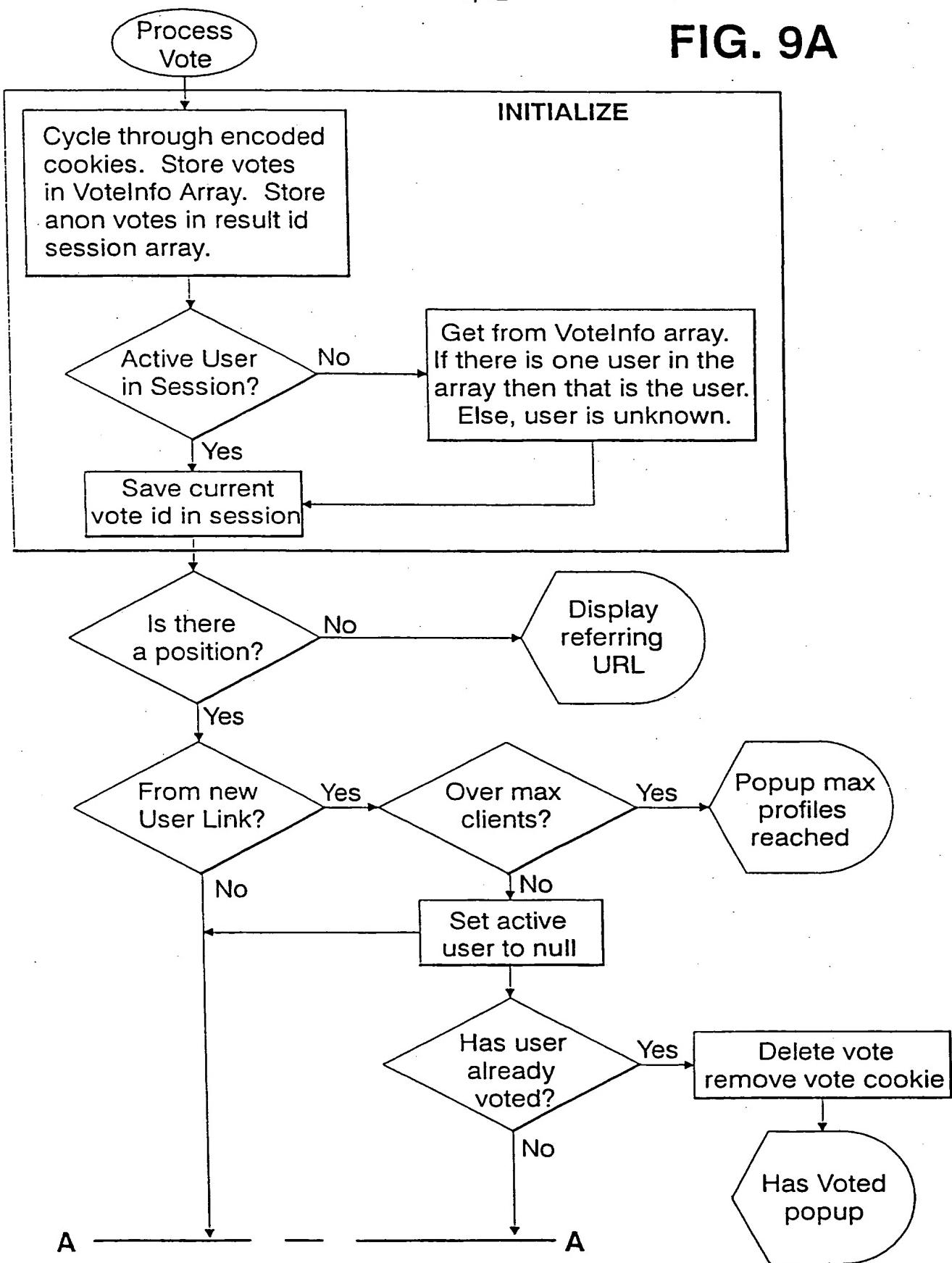


FIG. 8
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

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FIG. 9A

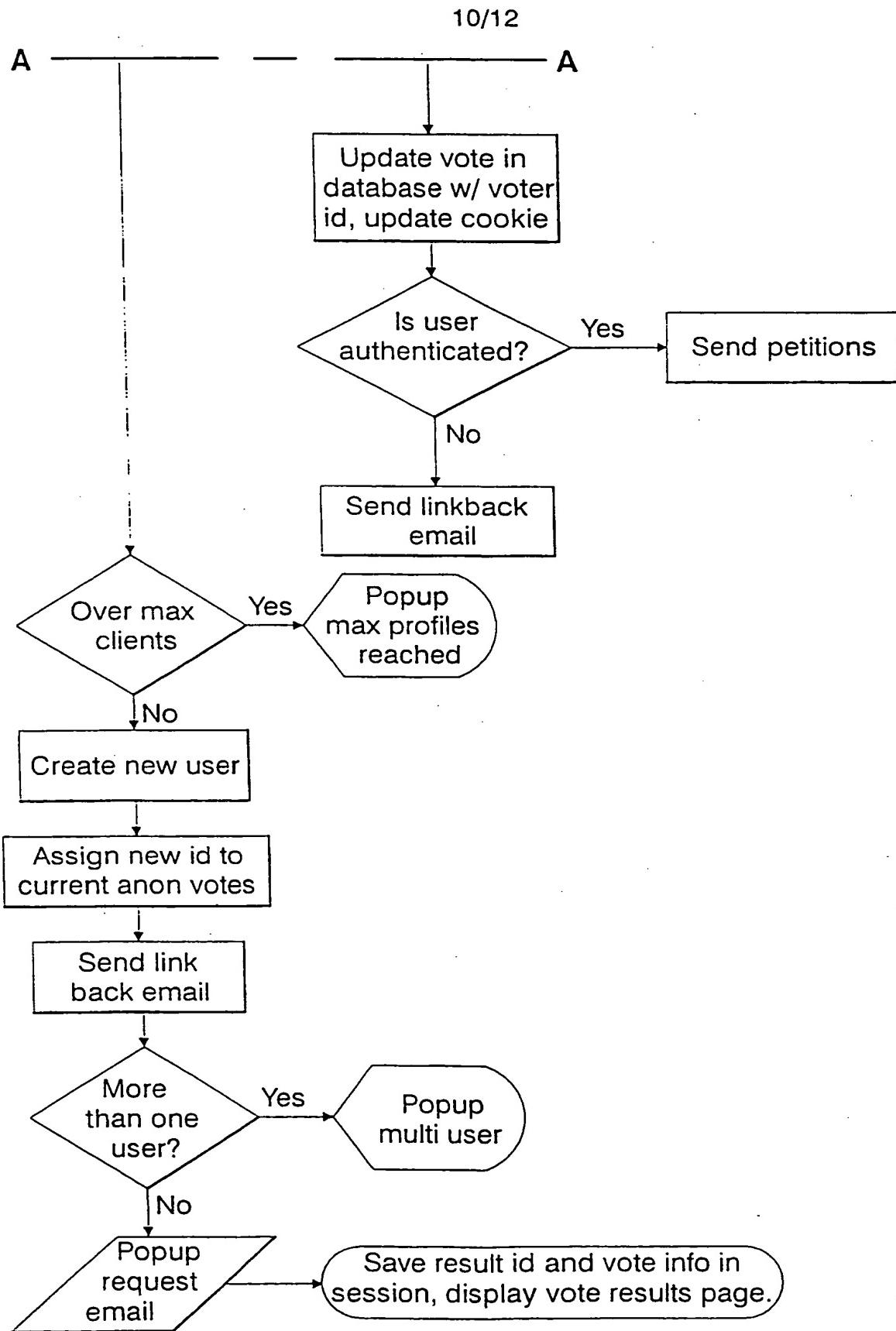
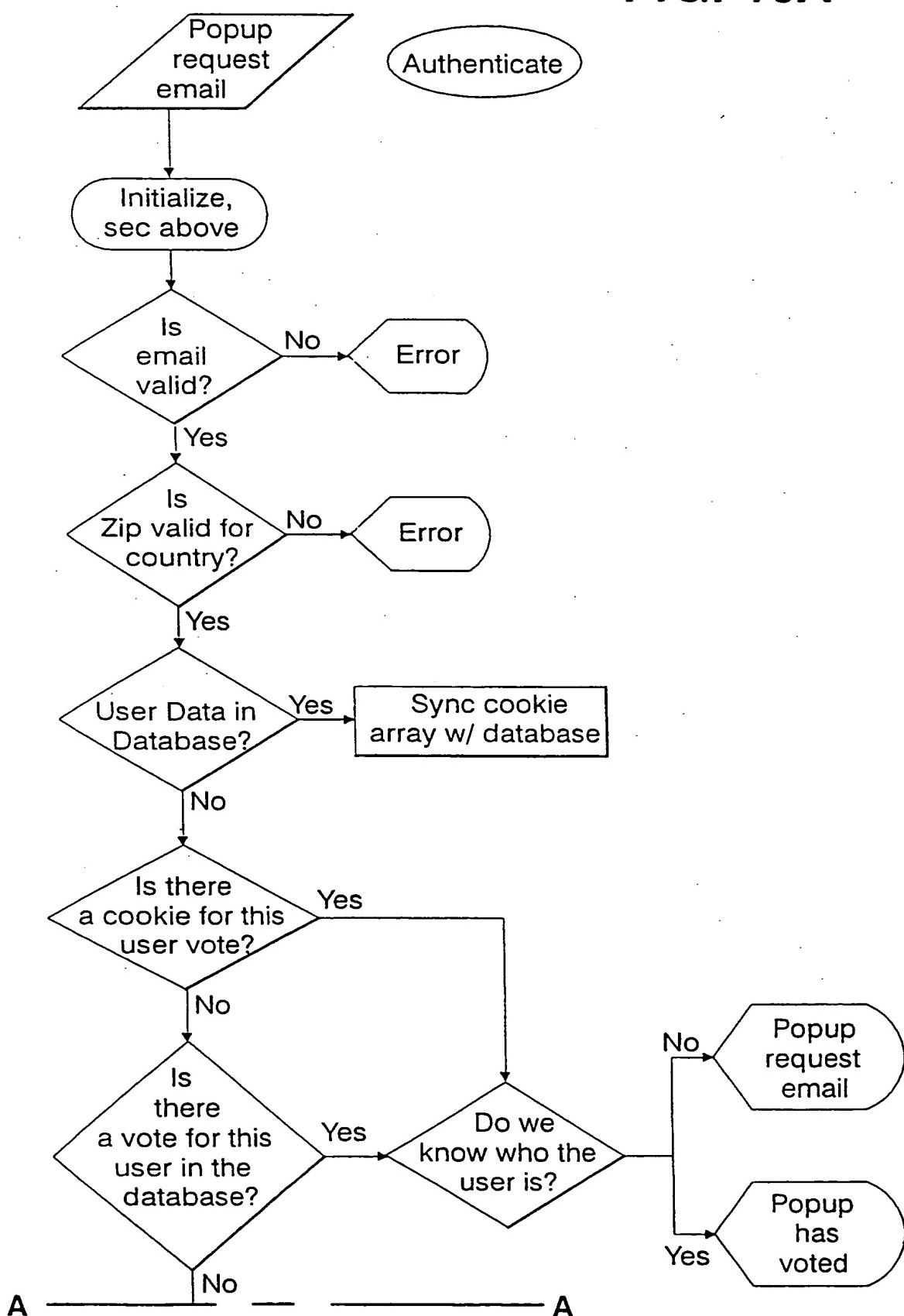


FIG. 9B

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FIG. 10A



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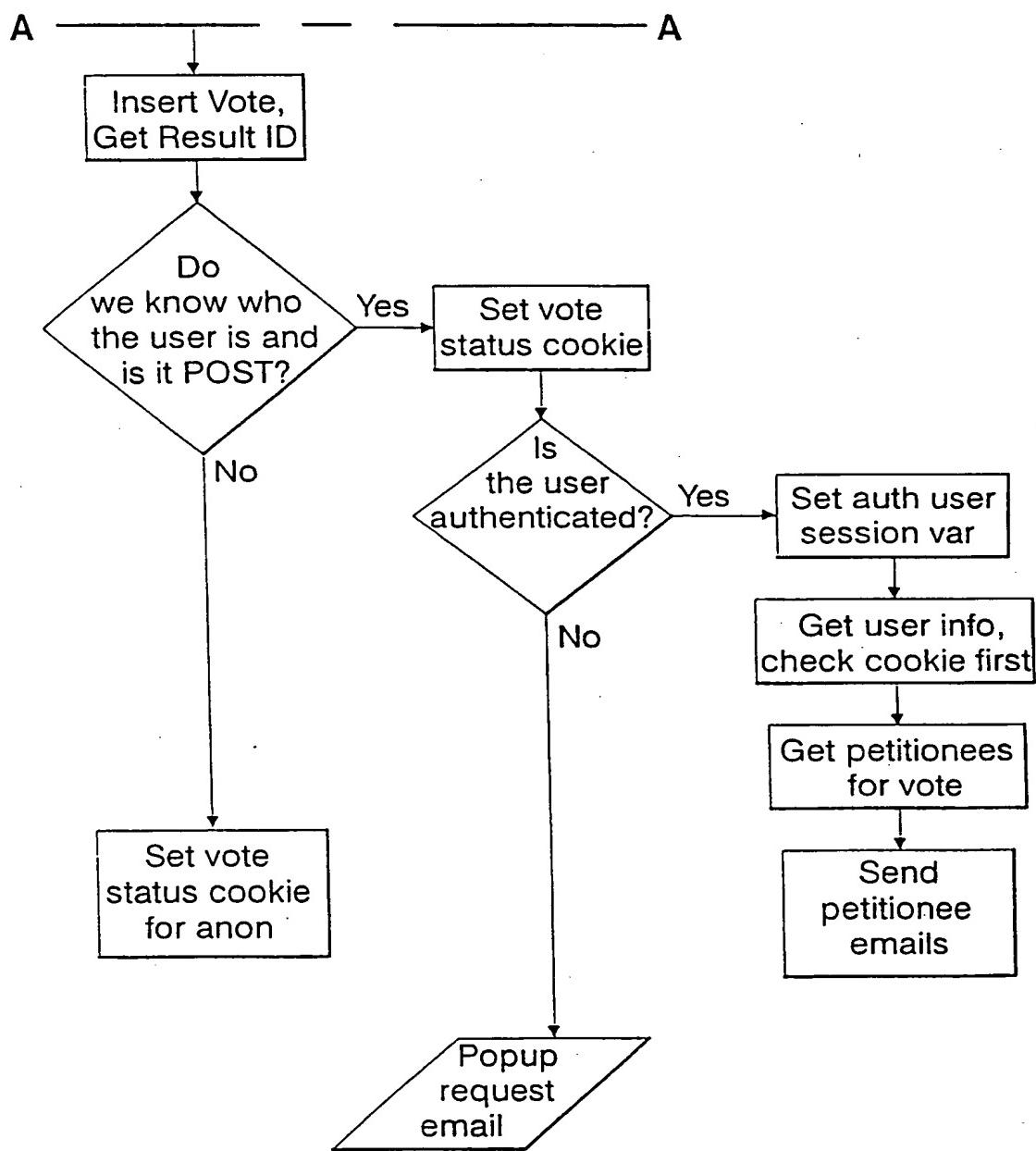


FIG. 10B

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

In. National Application No

PCT/US 00/29462

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 G07C13/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 G07C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	WO 99 53390 A (CHOICE LOGIC CORP ;FAGERSTROM DANA (US); URKEN ARNOLD B (US)) 21 October 1999 (1999-10-21) page 3, line 15 -page 5, line 10 page 6, line 20 -page 15, line 2 page 18, line 19 -page 20, line 16 page 54, line 16 -page 55, line 21; figures ---	1-35
X	US 5 950 172 A (KLINGMAN EDWIN E) 7 September 1999 (1999-09-07) column 4, line 20 -column 5, line 11 column 9, line 7 -column 10, line 45 column 23, line 5 - line 34; figures ---	1-11 -/-

Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

T later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

X document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

Y document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

& document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

1 March 2001

Date of mailing of the international search report

08/03/2001

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Authorized officer

Teutloff, H

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 00/29462

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5 875 432 A (SEHR RICHARD PETER) 23 February 1999 (1999-02-23) column 2, line 7 - line 64 column 4, line 46 -column 8, line 62; figures ---	1-5
A	column 2, line 7 - line 64 column 4, line 46 -column 8, line 62; figures ---	6-30
X	US 5 400 248 A (CHISHOLM JOHN D) 21 March 1995 (1995-03-21) abstract column 2, line 65 -column 3, line 41 -----	1,30

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/US 00/29462

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)		Publication date
WO 9953390	A 21-10-1999	AU EP	4307299 A 1073941 A	01-11-1999 07-02-2001
US 5950172	A 07-09-1999	US WO US	5729594 A 9804083 A 5799285 A	17-03-1998 29-01-1998 25-08-1998
US 5875432	A 23-02-1999		NONE	
US 5400248	A 21-03-1995		NONE	